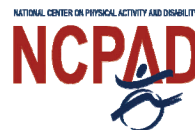


Increasing Physical Activity in Individuals with Disabilities



Why Be Active?

Children and adults who have a disability can gain numerous mental and physical benefits from being physically active on a regular basis. These benefits include:

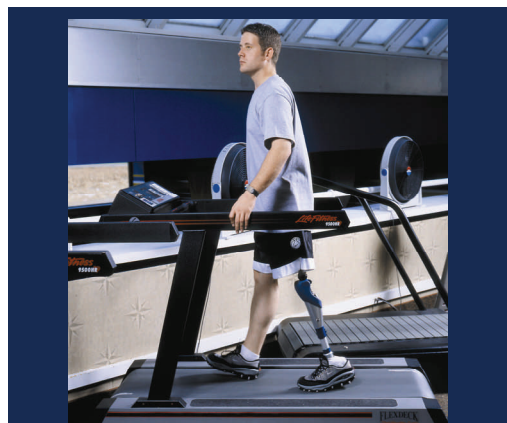
- Reduced risk of developing a chronic condition, such as diabetes, stroke, or heart disease.
- Reduced risk of developing a secondary condition related to the primary disability. For example, an individual who has a lower limb paralysis and utilizes a wheelchair may become overweight due to inactivity. Over time, chronic shoulder pain or a rotator cuff tear may develop due to overuse or poor muscle development in the shoulders and arms. This shoulder injury or pain continues the cycle of inactivity.
- Improved self-esteem.
- Greater social interaction.
- Ability to maintain a higher level of independence.

Increasing Physical Activity, Fitness, and Sports Participation

People with disabilities face multiple barriers to being active. Lack of programming or knowledge on how to adapt activities, inaccessible or unwelcoming facilities, financial constraints, and the disability itself are just a few of these barriers.

A few things to keep in mind:

- The activity doesn't have to be strenuous to provide physical and emotional benefits.
- Be positive and encouraging. Remember that a person with a disability is just as capable and worthy of being active as someone without a disability.
- Seek out opportunities to be active. Look for programs that may already be in place that include people with disabilities. Places to start are public agencies, health care, fitness, or recreational centers, sports clubs, and parks departments. Including people with disabilities in existing programs does not require major adaptations. Inclusion can be as simple as knowing alternative movements or techniques for engaging in the activity and ways to adapt existing equipment using readily available materials. With a little training, it's easy for program or facility staff to make adaptations.
- Find enjoyable activities. Having fun is key! Some options include team or individual sports, a gym-based exercise program, outdoor recreational activities, or running, biking, or swimming in area races.
- Set goals prior to enrolling in a program or starting a routine. This may help identify the activities or programs that will lead to success. Goals may range from making a new friend to learning the rules of a game or increasing muscle strength or stamina.



Some Things to Consider:

Nearly **1-in-5 Americans** aged 5 years and older have at least one disability. Only 12% of adults with a disability meet the minimum physical activity recommendation of 30 minutes of moderate physical activity 5 or more days a week or 20 minutes of vigorous activity at least 3 days a week.¹

Physical inactivity “among people who have a disability has been linked to an increase in the severity of disability” and a decreased involvement in the community. This is particularly concerning as individuals age and the natural effects of the aging process become more problematic due to years of being inactive.²

Everyone is capable and deserving of the same opportunities to be active!



Example of arm placement for wheelchair users

A Tool to Help: The Pedometer³

Although the original intent of the pedometer was to measure walking by wearing the device on the waist, it will measure any general movement. The most important things are that the device be worn at the same location on the body and kept parallel to the ground. Some alternative locations include the arm, wrist, ankle, or attached to a shoe. A safety strap, arm band, or piece of clothing can help secure the pedometer and keep it from rubbing against the skin.

To track activity, start with a baseline count. Wear the pedometer (in the same location) every day for one week. At the end of each day, record the number. Find the baseline number by adding the counts from each day together and dividing by the total number of days (7).

Establish a goal that is challenging yet achievable. For example, increase the average daily count by 10% each week for six weeks. The President's Challenge program, www.presidentschallenge.org, has a free Web and paper-based activity log that can help track progress.

Resources

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Disability: Links to a variety of Web-based resources on topics ranging from health and wellness to education, employment, and information technology. www.hhs.gov/od/index.html

Adaptive Information Resource Center: Provides information on recreational and sports programs for adults and children. Web site allows user to search by state or program type. www.adaptiveirc.org

Disabled Sports USA: Information on sports rehabilitation programs nationwide. Programs are open to anyone with a permanent disability and range from water and snow skiing to rafting and tennis. www.dsusa.org

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For More Information

The President's Council on Physical Fitness & Sports
Voice: 202-690-9000
Online: www.fitness.gov

The National Center on Physical Activity & Disability
Voice and TTY: 1-800-900-8086
Online: www.ncpad.org